

# IRISH ORGANIC FARMERS' AND GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

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## IOFGA SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF THE ORGANIC FARMING SCHEME SEPTEMBER 2009

It is the opinion of IOFGA that the current review of the Organic Farming Scheme should take the following points into consideration;

- § Farmers who are currently certified with an organic certification body (approximately 900) and who are due to finish up REPS 2 & 3 in the coming years should be given direct access to the OFS as they have proven themselves to be compliant and form the majority of the organic sector in Ireland
- § New applicants to the OFS should complete a specifically designed training course. These courses should be designed for each sector and offered regionally. It will be necessary to bring in individual trainers from the sector to give the courses. Applicants will pay for the training course.
- § A relevant business plan for the enterprise that the applicant plans to undertake should be part of the requirements of the training course
- § Training courses should only be compulsory for people entering from conventional agriculture, certified organic producers should be exempt from a training course
- § Anyone who is ejected/thrown out of the certification scheme by an OCB or DAFF should repay any monies paid to them through the OFS
- § Farmers operating on good land should be allowed to increase stocking units if it is proven that the carrying capacity of the land will hold increased numbers
- § Existing organic farmers should complete a brief outline of their business and how they see it developing over the next five years
- § The major deficit in organic production in Ireland is in horticulture with up to 70% being imported to meet the current demand. If as projected the sector continues to grow and demand increases then we need to address the fact that a small number of organic growers are entering commercial production otherwise the import percentage may reach as high as 80-90%. Currently there are no initiatives in place which will effectively reduce imports in the medium and long term. The majority of horticultural operators in the organic sector are producing on less than 10 acres and therefore do

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not benefit from the OFS. Provision should be made for these small scale producers to benefit from the OFS.

- Ø Production grants should be allocated to small organic horticultural producers to make it more viable in the long term as many small organic growers are operating on very tight margins. These grants should be specifically to allow these businesses to grow and should operate independently to the capital grant scheme. This incentive has the potential to encourage organic growers to record accurate yields giving realistic figures on how much Irish organic produce is really being sold in Ireland. The current system where many organic growers depend on voluntary labour is not sustainable and limits production capabilities
- Ø Farmers who are applying to the OFS should be encouraged to look at horticultural production and be given extra incentives to grow organic produce. This aspect of production could be leased to individuals with organic horticultural experience if the land owner does not have the expertise to produce commercial crops.
- § A simple assessment system should be introduced on each farm in order to record the environmental improvements on each farm on an annual basis before payments are made, for example recording wildlife habitats and improved biodiversity on the farm
- § The new scheme must support low-carbon farming it should provide incentives for encouraging farming practices and soil-management that minimise carbon emissions and maximise carbon storage in soil.
- § Farmers who address on farm energy use by incorporating renewable energy technologies on the farm should be recognised in the new scheme. Incentives should be given for farmers to embrace technologies such as wind turbines, anaerobic digesters, heat pumps and solar panels on farms